

## SB 476: Competitive bids by MDOC for all goods and services

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CAPPS certainly shares the desire make corrections operations as cost-efficient as possible. However, we do have several concerns about the potential effect of SB 476.

The MDOC has undoubtedly provided you with detailed explanations of why privatizing both food service and transportation would not be cost-efficient. Privatizing food service was already tried some years ago at Huron Valley and failed. Although this may work in some county jails, the logistics of a statewide prison system are quite different. Privatizing transportation has been tried in other jurisdictions with sometimes deadly results. Underpaid transport officers who are pressed to meet unrealistic deadlines drive for too long and get into accidents. Conditions for the prisoners being transported (food, bathroom breaks, vehicle seating) are sometimes deplorable, in order to save money.

CAPPS has two additional concerns. First, whenever there is talk of privatization, the extent to which prisoner jobs are at stake does not seem to get discussed. While it is not an issue in transportation, food service is one of the better jobs available to prisoners and one of the few that actually teaches some useful skills. It would be ironic if, at a time when so much effort is being put into helping returning prisoners find jobs and develop marketable skills, SB 476 eliminated one of the few opportunities available for prisoners to learn not only practical skills but the discipline of working hard at regular hours. The prison food service system relies on mass purchases of inexpensive food, cheap prison labor and supervision by civilian employees, not corrections officers. It is hard to imagine how a privatized system that transported food prepared outside by non-prisoners could be any cheaper or that the quality would be better. However, even if a private vendor somehow looked competitive, we urge legislators to ask how many prisoner jobs are involved, how much in lost wages would not be spent at the prison store, on the phones talking to family, paid back in restitution to victims or in courts costs or saved for release, and what the cost would be of teaching those food preparation skills in a separate class, instead of as on-the-job training.

Second, the language of the bill is so broad, it might affect a lot more prison jobs besides food service. The mechanics of Michigan State Industries' relationship to the MDOC have to be considered. MSI employs prisoners in garment, shoe, mattress and furniture factories that supply the department with prisoner uniforms, shoes, mattresses, beds, desks, chairs and other furniture. It also runs a laundry and a print shop. CAPPS understands that the department executes purchase orders for these goods and services that are then sold to it by MSI. The broad language of SB 476 that would require the department to "solicit competitive bids and use competitive solicitation from the private sector for all purchases of goods and services for the department" would seem to call for careful consideration. Hopefully prison industries will not end up being eliminated because uniforms or shoes made by child laborers in Asia or Latin America are cheaper.

Thank you for taking these points into account.